

September 4, 2022

Luke 14:25-35

“It’s Worth the Price!”

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
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Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Many years ago a nationwide network of banks placed a full-page ad in a magazine with the following headline: “Before you start looking, better find out how much house you can afford.”

Once they had the reader’s attention, the ad continued:

When most of us look for a home of our dreams, we lead with our hearts. We see the wood in the den and the tile in the bathroom and the morning sun in the kitchen. But we don’t see the need to talk about money just yet. That can wait. So, starry-eyed, we fall in love with a house; before we know how much house we can afford. How human, how worrisome and how unnecessary. Because the last thing on your mind should be the first place you start.

Not exactly an ad that one would expect to read today. Far too much common sense! Interestingly, the idea of the ad can be found in our gospel lesson. Jesus relates a parable to make a point: “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’” The point that Jesus is making is that there is a cost when you receive and follow him. There is a cost associated with being a Christian.

The undeserved kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ in his sufferings and death, the love of God in the sending of his Son to pay for our sins, and the participation that we have with the Holy Spirit and with one another is costly. It condemns sin. It calls us to die with Jesus. We were bought at the price of Jesus’ blood. It was a very expensive gift that forgives sins. It gives us true and eternal life. It saves us from death and hell.

What cost God so much should never be cheap in our minds so that we see the cross as a permission to live in unrepentant sin. Grace is the undeserved gift that changes us now and forever. And to follow Christ means to die with him. Jesus says (Luke 9:23-26):

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels ...

To follow Jesus means to go the way of the cross. We do not give free reign to the sinful flesh, for our sinful desires seek to destroy faith. We do not give free reign to the enticements of this unbelieving world, for those who are without Christ would have us live without him as well. And we put to death the temptations of the devil and resist his schemes, for in his blind rage he would drag us down with him into the eternal torture prepared for him and all the fallen angels. As we pointed out, grace is costly. It isn’t cheap. In the blessed gift of Jesus we lose our life and therefore find life.

Luther once said: “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” Jesus is looking for disciples. And what is a disciple? Jesus says: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).” To abide in Jesus’ word and to be baptized according to his command is to be a disciple. It is to know the truth and to be set free. True freedom is being free from sin - to be forgiven. It happens when we hear his gospel. It happens in our Baptism where Paul tells us that we die and are buried with Jesus. It happens when we drink the cup of salvation - a cup that flows from our Savior’s cross.

What Jesus said to James and John is also for us: “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized ... (Mark 10:39).” Remember that James and John were seeking seats of greatness and ease in the kingdom. It’s as if Jesus was saying to them and us: “You want to be great do you? Then drink the cross and be baptized with my death. While there is forever freedom in my cup and baptism you will also find that you will become a slave of righteousness. And to be a slave of righteousness in this unrighteous world will cause you the loss of yourself and much suffering for my sake. You will live as I lived. But take heart I have overcome and you will overcome with me!”

Indeed! We lose our life for his sake that we may find it. We become willing servants of what is right so that we become aliens and strangers down here. Moreover, in his gospel of forgiveness, we are called to abandon the attachments of this world. We realize, as the apostle John boldly writes in chapter two, verse seventeen, in his first epistle: “... the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” And we stand for the gospel and the freedom it gives. And when these things become important to us, that is, when we daily live in the cross and die with Jesus, we find that as Jesus was rejected, so are we. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

The messengers of Jesus will be hated to the end of time. They will be blamed for all the division which rend cities and homes. Jesus and his disciples will be condemned on all sides for undermining family life, and for leading the nation astray; they will be called crazy fanatics and disturbers of the peace. The disciples will be sorely tempted to desert their Lord. But the end is also near, and they must hold on and persevere until it comes. Only he will be blessed who remains loyal to Jesus and his word until the end.

From what we have discovered so far in this sermon, we can say that the cost of discipleship is costly. It costs a lot to be a follower of Jesus. Our Lord says in our lesson, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Those are tough words. Knowing the truth and being set free can and does divide. When Jesus says that we are to hate family and ourselves, he means that we are not to love family and ourselves more than him; that is, we are to fully love righteousness and refuse wickedness.

Like him, we hate all unrighteousness in family and in us, and we refuse to embrace it, and we pray that all may be righteous in Jesus. It says in Ps. 101:3, “I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.” And it says in Jude 20-23: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves

in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”

The cost of discipleship is to take a good look at the kingdom - the holy house of God - and understand what it means to not only be a part of that kingdom, but what it will mean for us to build it in our lives and in the lives of others. As there was a steep price for Jesus to pay for all of our sins, so when that forgiveness of sins and righteousness of Jesus is given to us in an unforgiving and unrighteous world, we will suffer in our flesh and from the abuse of both this unbelieving world and the devil. So, what will get us through. We consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:8-12, 17-18,

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you ... So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

So, what do you think? I don't know about you, but when I count the cost of discipleship ... I discover that **It's Worth the Price!**

Pastor Brock Abbott